

Documents on Diplomacy: Exercises

A Sampler of Historical Peculiarities

The Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, N.Y., contains 10,000 linear feet of presidential records, and the storage vaults of the National Archives and the Washington Federal Records Center hold thousands more diplomatic, political, and military records. Historians are still researching and writing the life of Franklin Roosevelt. These selections are just a sampling of the many, many volumes of books produced about FDR.

A. “On December 2, 1940 President Roosevelt left Washington for a Caribbean cruise aboard the *USS Tuscaloosa*. Wary from the months of crisis touched off by the fall of France and the rigors of the recent presidential campaign, Roosevelt accompanied only by his personal staff and his close adviser, Harry L. Hopkins, looked forward to two weeks of relaxation. . . .

“At prearranged points along the way, Navy seaplanes delivered the White House mail and the various state papers requiring the President’s signature. On the morning of December 9, a Navy seaplane delivered a long personal letter from Winston Churchill. In 4,000 words he described the grave course of the war, emphasizing Britain’s critical need for American supplies. . . .

“On December 16, the President arrived in Washington, tanned and rested. The next day at his press conference, he revealed his bold and imaginative response to Britain’s financial crisis. . . . In an apt parable, he compared his idea of leasing materials to Churchill just as like “lending a garden hose to a neighbor whose house was on fire.” “You didn’t sell your hose to the neighbor, you loaned it to him, and he gave it back when the fire was out.”

Divine, Robert A.
The Reluctant Belligerent: American Entry into World War II
(1967) *America in Crisis Series*, pp.103–106.

B. “Traveling with Churchill in Scotland (Roosevelt send him as an emissary avoiding Secretary of State Cordell Hull), Hopkins heard him tell a Glasgow audience ‘my one aim is to extirpate Hitlerism from Europe’. That evening, at dinner, Hopkins told the assembled company: ‘I suppose you wish to know what I am going to say to President Roosevelt on my return?’ He would he said be quoting a verse from the Bible, ‘whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God’. He paused, then added quietly, “even to the end’. Churchill wept. . . .”

Gilbert, Martin.
Churchill, A Life (1991), pp. 687–689
(Churchill’s official biographer)

C. “American leaders looked upon Britain (as the war grew) as a misguided friend unfortunately wedded to dangerous and outmoded patterns of behavior. It was the duty of the United States to set this friend right for her own good and the good of the world. Russia, in contrast, was seen as the unfairly maligned giant, a bear too long harassed by an unsympathetic world. Russia had been so badly treated in the past that it was now necessary for the United States and Britain to make an extra effort to be warm and understanding.

“While Roosevelt, Churchill, and their advisors privately wrestled with the different theories for the maintenance of peace, the official public declaration of Anglo American war aims remained the Atlantic Charter, a generalized statement drafted by the two leaders in August, 1941, and subsequently accepted by all countries joining the war against the Axis.

“Soviet Russia adhered to the Charter with capacious qualification that the ‘practical application of these principles will necessarily adapt itself to the circumstances, needs, and historic peculiarities of particular countries.’” (Statement of ambassador to Great Britain)

Smith, Gaddis.
American Diplomacy During the Second World War, 1941-1945
(1967) *America in Crisis Series*, pp. 14–15.

D. “The personality of Franklin D. Roosevelt “still broods, sphinx like, over the landscape of United States diplomacy. . . . During Roosevelt’s tenure in the White House from 1933 to 1945, the United States shrugged off traditional restraints of indifference, isolation, and insecurity; by April, 1945, when death swept FDR from office, the nation had assumed a stance in world affairs more consonant with its economic, military, and political strength. Franklin Roosevelt, himself, set in motion some, and presided over all, of the decisions that moved America from a position of relative unimportance in world politics to one approaching global domination.”

“FDR was a focus of controversy throughout his brilliant career; however, after his death the partisans in an enduring historical debate assigned greater significance to his actions than either admirers or critics attributed to them during his lifetime. Some historians have credited President Roosevelt with almost super human abilities... while others have asserted that FDR was solely responsible for divers misguided or evil acts, such as luring Japan into the Pearl Harbor attack and selling out Eastern Europe to the Soviet Union...”

Wilson, Theodore A. and Richard McKinzie
The Masks of Power: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Conduct of American Diplomacy.
Essay from *Makers of American Diplomacy*,
Edited by Frank J. Merli and Theodore A. Wilson.(1974)
pp. 459–462, 489–490.

E. “From August 9-12, 1941, Roosevelt and Churchill secretly met to discuss the coordination of policy in case the United States entered the war. On a British warship in Placentia Bay off Newfoundland, they formulated a joint statement that would ultimately guide the nations’ policies through the end of the war. Roosevelt, with the help of a cane and his son Elliott, joined the British prime minister after walking the length of the vessel before 1,500 men standing at attention. Sunday church services on August 10 highlighted the singing of ‘Onward Christian Soldiers’, which brought tears to the president’s eyes and led him to remark to his son that, ‘if nothing else had happened, that would have cemented us.... We are and we will, go on, with God’s help.’ Churchill saw deep meaning in the day’s events and wrote in his memoirs of the war.... ‘Every word seemed to stir the heart. It was a great hour to live.’”

Jones, Howard
The Course of American Diplomacy
(1988) pp. 422–424

F. “The rumored secret meeting of Roosevelt with Churchill had lead American opinion to expect some kind of world-

shattering pronouncement. The immediate reaction was one of disappointment, for the Atlantic Charter was largely a mixture of Rooseveltian New Deal and the Wilsonian Fourteen Points. ... The eight-point charter like the fourteen-point Wilson program, was enheartening to those liberals who hope for a better postwar world, and encouraging to conquered peoples, like the Poles...”

“The Atlantic Charter, from the standpoint of the United States was in effect a formal acceptance of full responsibility for the defeat of Hitler and the establishment of a democratic peace. The isolationists denounced the agreement as one more move toward open collaboration with Britain, as indeed it was, only the public was not informed of the most secret understandings.”

Bailey, Thomas A.
A Diplomatic History of the American People
(1980) pp.728–729

G. “The lend-lease bill, symbolically numbered 1776, was introduced into Congress in January, 1941, and rather misleadingly named, ‘An Act Further to Promote the Defense of the United States’. The debate was bitter. “Mothers kneeling on the steps of the capital held signs that read: Kill Bill 1776, Not Our Boys.’ Senator Taft of Ohio scoffed that ‘lending war equipment is a good deal like lending chewing gum. You don’t want it back.... The final vote was 60 yeas and 31 nays in the Senate; 317 yeas and 71 nays in the House.... Roosevelt signed it on March 11, 1941.”

“The lend-lease act, which sanctioned the expenditure of an ultimate \$50 billion must take high rank among the most momentous laws every passed by Congress. It was more than the abandonment of neutrality... It was an unofficial declaration of war on the war-mad dictators... Militarily and diplomatically this ‘aid to democracies bill’, which greatly boosted British morale, was one of the grand climaxes of the war.”

Bailey, Thomas
Ibid, pp. 721–723.

H.

Reference for H:

I.

Reference for H:

J. The Atlantic Charter and the Lend Lease Bill included. . .

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